

THE HEIMA TAVERN  
KINGSTON, PENNSYLVANIA

H.A.B.S. No. Pa.-235

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*Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings*  
PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of Pennsylvania

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Thomas H. Atherton, District Officer  
306 Dime Bank Bldg., Wilkes-Barre, Pa.

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THE HELME TAVERN  
Kingston, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania

<u>Owner</u>	The Harrinton Estate.
<u>Builder</u>	John Ebert, completed by: James Wheeler.
<u>Date of Erection</u>	Begun, 1804; completed, 1807.
<u>Present Condition</u>	Well preserved. All but two of the fireplaces are open. Most of the flooring is original. Lay-out has been changed. Front of the building has been remodelled. Doors and entrance are original, some of the original hardware remains.
<u>Number of Stories</u>	Three.
<u>Materials of Construction</u>	Stone foundations, frame construction, wood shingled roof, wood floors, random widths.

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THE HELME TAVERN  
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The Helme Tavern, formerly known as the Exchange Hotel is located in Kingston Borough, Kingston, Pennsylvania.

About 1804, John Ebert who was conducting a saddlery shop in the village then known as Myersburg, purchased from Lawrence Myers, house lots Nos. 4, 5, and part of 6 and began the erection of the Exchange Hotel. He was unable to complete it, however and in 1807, left the country. James Wheeler who was then sheriff, succeeded him and completed the structure in 1807. He kept it until his death on September 26, 1809.

For some reason, our earlier tavern keepers, after a few years of open house would sell their business to new-comers and would later appear as taverners at some other stand. In olden times, the Exchange Hotel had many well known landlords among whom were: John Ebert, 1804; James Wheeler, 1809; Joseph Wheeler, 1809-1811; Miner Searle, 1810; Archippus Parrish, 1812-1813; Col. Naphtali Hurlbut, 1814-1825; Wm. C. Johnson, 1825 until his death in 1826, when his widow operated the place until 1827; John Sax, 1832; Oliver Helme, and Fred Pennsy, 1832-1846; Frank Helme, 1847-1856; Thomas Wambald, 1857. Among the later landlords have been: Patrick McPike, Henry Gebler, Fred Boyer, Hiram Williams in 1900; John Harrington, Steve Teller and Timothy Harrington. It is now owned by the Harrington Estate and is occupied by Fred Brokenshire, tavern keeper and the Carrol and Mowery families in the upstairs apartments.

Once considered a very commodious and up-to-date public house, this interesting structure had never been remodelled until 1929. It is probably the oldest building in Northeastern Pennsylvania used continuously as it was built, for a hotel. Originally, there were two front entrances, a large hall divided the building. The parlor and dining room were on the northerly side and the bar room was opposite. This was probably the original layout, although at one time, the bar room adjoined the parlor and probably occupied a part of it. The ball room was on the second floor on the southerly side and in all, there were 17 or 18 rooms. The most interesting section was the kitchen with its great fireplace and warming ovens, extending across one side of the large room. The food was cooked

over the open fireplace and until recently, many of the old cooking utensils and appliances were preserved and stowed away behind the panels which closed the fireplace. The fireplace was re-opened in 1933.

In the early days, the political parties usually held their county conventions in this tavern; and in the ball room, there were many social gatherings. In this hotel, then called the Helme Tavern, the Lackawanna and Bloomsburg R.R. was organized in 1852, bringing about entrance at Kingston, of the first locomotive, drawing passengers to enter Wyoming Valley. On April 5, 1852 a charter was granted for a road between Scranton and Bloomsburg, 56 miles with authority to extend the same to Danville. By supplementary act passed March 3, 1853, a further extension of twelve miles to Northumberland or Sunbury was authorized, making a total length of eighty miles. The company was organized at this hotel, April 16, 1853 and William Swetland was chosen President; Thomas F. Atherton, Secretary; and Charles D. Shoemaker, Treasurer. It was commenced in 1854 with E. Mc Neill, Engineer, and was finished in 1857 at a cost of \$1,100,000.00

Previous to the incorporation of this railroad, the people of Kingston Township, disturbed over construction of the canal on the east side of the Susquehanna, had not allowed their disappointment to overcome their ambition and early cast about for some means of access to the outside world. People of New Troy, now Wyoming, initiated the movement for construction of a railroad on the West Side and among early meetings of the group, one on March 1, 1833, was held at the Exchange Hotel. Organization of the Susquehanna Railroad Company was the outcome, although the company languished in the panic of 1837.

Major Oliver Helme, who gave the Exchange Hotel the new name of Helme Tavern, was born in Kingstown, Rhode Island, October, 1770 and came here from Ballston, N.Y. He engaged in the chair making business in Wilkes-Barre in 1798. In 1801, he kept the Yarrington Ferry and tavern in Kingston. He was sheriff of the county from 1828 to 1831, and in 1832, he purchased the tavern (Exchange Hotel) which he conducted for many years. On October 10, 1838, he removed to Bridgewater, Susquehanna County, but later returned here and died in 1851.

While general lines of the building remain unchanged, recent years have seen the front of the building made into stores. Fire at the hotel on April 26, 1933 destroyed a part of the rear portion of the building, particularly the three bedrooms over the original kitchen, and the winding stairway beside the ovens and fireplace. This portion, when rebuilt was changed to a kitchen and dining room on the second floor. The service stairway was eliminated.

The old kitchen and dining room on the first floor was remodelled and new floors were laid in this portion.

A sign in front of the building reads as follows: "Exchange Hotel long known as the Helme Tavern, conducted by Oliver Helme. One of the oldest buildings in Wyoming Valley, a principal meeting place of the people in early times. Here in 1832, was organized the movement to erect Wyoming Monument and rebury those slain in the Battle of Wyoming. In this building on Saturday, May 22, 1852 was organized the Lackawanna and Bloomsburg R.R. the first railroad to enter Wyoming Valley."

Helme Tavern is a three story building of frame construction. Exterior finish, wood siding; interior finish, walls and ceilings, plastered. Foundations are stone. Most of the floors are original and are of random widths. New floor in the old ball room has been laid over the old floor. The entrance door is original. It is Colonial in type with a fan-like transom.

The bar room is the first door to the left of the main hall; a small kitchen leads off the bar room. This may be original. To the right of the hall is the remodelled kitchen, now called the grill. This large room was really the kitchen and dining room. Here there is a very large, open stone fireplace with brick face in grate chamber, stone hearth and iron grate. It is very blackened with use. What is now the barber shop was formerly the parlor. There is a closed fireplace here.

Adjoining the bar room on the opposite side of the hall, what was once the lobby of the hotel is now a cleaning establishment. Here there is an open fireplace still in use, with wood mantel and brick facing. It is simple in design. The floor here has been lowered at least ten inches. Directly opposite the main entrance is the original Colonial stairway to the second floor. It is very simple in design. The steps are narrow and well worn. The old cloak hangers remain on the wall outside the original dining room. Door to the dining room has the original thumb latches and hardware.

There is a landing and two steps leading off the main stairway to the rear portion of the building which has been remodelled. These rooms were formerly bed rooms and were reached by a continuation of the original hall. To the right of the long, wide hall is a closed stairway to the third floor of the building. The door has the original thumb latches. Just beyond this, there are two doors leading to the original ball room, now used as a living room. It is very large with an arch way approximate center of the room. The ceilings are low. A chair rail still remains in the ball room, hall, former office and all bed rooms. In the ball room

there are two windows facing front and two facing the rear. They have small lights in the upper sash. There is an open fireplace with brick face and hearth. Sides are decorated with two small columns and the mantel is plain wood. The original wine cupboard remains on the left side of the fireplace.

To the left of the hall there are two large bedrooms. In the first is a closed fireplace with a plain wood mantel and a stone hearth and face, built in with brick and an iron grate. There is one closet and two windows with small lights. In the other bedroom facing the front, there is a fireplace similar to that in the first bedroom. There are two large closets and a door leading to what was originally, an office. The office is now a bath. Corner posts appear in the bed rooms. These are timbers used in the construction of the house. There are two windows facing front.

On the third floor is a very narrow, long hall. Six doors lead off the hall to bedrooms. Here, the floors are original and some of the doors have the original hardware. There is one large room with sloping ceiling which was, at one time, two smaller rooms. There are two dormer windows and another small window facing south west. There are also two entrances. The room directly across from this has been refinished in plaster. One window faces north. The room next to this has also been refinished. There is another small attic room with sloping roof. There is one small window. Another door leads to a very small storage room, also with sloping roof. To the right of the stairway is a large bedroom, which is refinished and which is occupied by Mr. Hartman who has lived in the hotel since 1900. There is a modern bath on this floor which might at one time, have been a trunk storage room.

Author *Betty Lee Garrison*  
Approved *Thomas H. Atkinson*  
Date *April 19, 1938*

Historical information received from the following sources: "History of Certified Township of Kingston," by Brewster. "History of Luzerne County", "Annals of Luzerne County"; Newspaper Clippings from: Wilkes-Barre Record, January, 1938; Times Leader, 1933.; Mr. Hartman, boarder at the Exchange Hotel for thirty-eight years.